

## **Enhancing Corporate Communication and Reputation Management through the Mass Media: Lessons from the University of Cape Coast**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents findings of a study that explored how authorities of the University of Cape Coast perceive the role of mass media in corporate communication and reputation management. The study which was descriptive by design, solicited information from 77 purposively selected senior members in the university. Simple quantitative methods involving frequency tables, percentages, bar and pie charts were employed in analyzing the data collected.*

*Among other findings, the study found that the University had adopted the use of multiple media especially radio, television, internet and newspaper to communicate to students, staff, the University Community and its large external publics. The university's use of media is however mostly uncoordinated.*

*Based on the findings, the paper argues that the University can maximize its benefits from the use of media if it adequately resources and positions its Division of Public Affairs to enable it enhance its performance and also educate the University Community on the role of media in corporate affairs.*

### **Introduction**

Communication, derived from the Latin word "communis" meaning "common" is defined as the process of creating, transmitting and interpreting ideas, facts, opinions and feelings (Cole,1996). Davis (2003) also sees the concept from the perspective of human relations and within the context of passing information and understanding from one person to another. Thus, communication can simply be defined as an exchange of meaning between individuals through a common system of symbols (The New Encyclopedia Britannica (1993)

Within the context of corporate entities, however, communication is defined as “communications between a corporation or other large organization and its internal and external audiences – the purpose of which is to create greater understanding for, and perception of the ideals and purposes of the organization” (Dolphin, 1999, p. 39). It is believed that the nomenclature of corporate communication is mainly European. In most contexts, a corporate institution is any organised social institution or body, whether commercial, public or voluntary. ‘Corporate’ implies organisations – both profit and non-profit making in their totality. It encompasses every-thing from the small family-run firm to the largest multinational. What defines it as corporate is its cohesion: the idea of people coming together and working towards a common goal (Ind, 1999). Jackson (1987) says corporate communication serves as the liaison between an organization and its publics.

Recent researches on the importance of corporate communication indicate that corporate communication helps an organization to create distinctive and appealing images with its stakeholder group, build a strong corporate brand, and develop reputation capital (Dowling, 1994, Riel, 1995, Fombrun, 1996). To achieve these ends, all forms of communication must be orchestrated

into a coherent whole (Riel, 1992 Bronn, 2002), and success criteria development that enable measuring the effects of the organization’s communication on its reputation and value (Riel & Fombrun, 2004). This involves building and maintaining a positive relationship with the media (radio, television, print, web, etc.) Communication is possible without the media, but media help communication to get easy and better. In spite of the important roles the media play in corporate communication and reputation, it appears that there are some negative perceptions and challenges associated with the use of the media in corporate communication and reputation management. There are situations where the media houses have been accused of taking news items from the grapevine on strategic issues and speculate them as news thereby creating problems for these authorities as they had to do damage control. To cope with these challenges, universities have set up Public Relations Sections to promote and regulate corporate communication through the media. But the question is, to what extent are the media used or involved in the administration of the University of Cape Coast. For instance, how does the University perceive and use the media as a communication tool? These are issues that require empirically derived evidence to make conclusions but which have attracted little research interest.

Within the foregoing research gap, the study informing this paper sought to find out how the University of Cape Coast authorities perceive the media in the University's corporate communication. To address this objective, the study was guided by the following overarching questions:

1. How does the University of Cape Coast Authorities communicate to its publics?
2. How does the University of Cape Coast Authorities perceive the role of the media in corporate communication?
3. What is the relationship between the media and the University authorities?
4. What challenges are associated with the University's use of the media in corporate communication?
5. How can the University improve the use of media for corporate communication and reputation management?

### **Theoretical contexts**

The study was informed by existing literature and ideas on corporate media operations. Specifically, it was informed by the Integrated Model of Media Selection theory.

### **The Integrated Model of Media Selection**

This theory emerged out of two related organizational communication theories: media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984) and

channel expansion theory (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). Both theories attempt to explain characteristics of a media channel in terms of its richness. Media richness refers to a channel's relative ability to convey messages that *communicate rich information*, and therefore explains how and why people choose a particular medium to communicate with others.

This study proposes the model of media selection that integrates most important concepts of media richness theory (Daft and Lengel, 1984) and channel expansion theory (Carlson and Zmud, 1999). In particular, the model uses rich and lean media continuum along with the concept of the need for reduced equivocality in communication as proposed by Daft and Lengel (1984).

### **Methodology**

The design for the study was descriptive survey, although the design was qualitative by nature, it utilized both qualitative and quantitative data collecting strategies such as interview and questionnaire and simple descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and statistical tables. Niglas' (1999) extensive and systematic review of 46 studies justified this combination. This conforms to views by Strauss and Corbin (1990); Patton, (1990), and Ryssek and Weinberg (1993).

### Population and Sample

The population for the study comprised 100 academic and non-academic staff of the University of Cape Coast in administrative positions. This was because, as Mankoe (2002) emphasizes, administrators within a university setting use

approximately 80% of their working time communicating. Since the target population was not so large, the researcher used all of them for the study. The sample of the study was the same as the population as depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sampled Population**

Authority	Department	Percentage (%)
Faculty of Arts	11	11
Faculty of Education	11	11
Faculty of Social Sciences	6	6
School of Agriculture	6	6
School of Biological sciences	6	6
School of Business	3	3
School of Medical Sciences	11	11
School of Physical Sciences	6	6
Supporting Services	14	14
Office of the Registrar (Central Administration)	26	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Vice Chancellor's Annual Report to the 41<sup>st</sup> congregation of the University of Cape Coast

It must however be noted that 77 responded to the questionnaire/interview. The table below shows the disaggregation and categorization of the study sample.

**Table 2: Disaggregation of respondents/heads**

Categorization	Gender				Total	%
	Male		Female			
	No.	%	No.	%		
Deputy Registrar	4	5.2	1	1.3	5	6.5
Senior Asst. Registrars	7	9.1	1	1.3	8	10.4
Assistant Registrars	7	9.1	3	3.9	10	13.0
Directors	5	6.5	0	0.0	5	6.5
Professors	2	2.6	0	0.0	2	2.6
Associate Professors	4	5.2	0	0.0	4	5.2
Senior Lecturers	17	22.0	11	14.3	28	36.3
Lecturers	13	16.9	2	2.6	15	19.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>76.6</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>23.4</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(n = 77)

### Research Instruments

The researcher used questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection even though in addition, the researcher practically observed specific media and communication activities by these authorities throughout the research period, analyzed some documents (steps and processes in corporate communication) and conducted interviews with the Registrar, the Public Relations Officer, the Dean of Student Affairs, the President of the Students Representative Council, the

News Editor and Programmes Co-ordinator of ATL FM Station to confirm and validate some of the information/data obtained.

### Discussion and Findings

#### How UCC Authorities Communicate to its Publics

Research question one sought to find out the various means that the University Authorities adopted in communicating to the university's large communities (publics). Their responses are contained in Table 3.

**Table 3: Ranked means of Medium of Communication**

Means	M*	SD
Students and staff receive information through the notice board.	3.47	0.553
Students and staff receive information through memos, circulars and letters	3.43	0.768
Students and staff receive information verbally through their Heads of Departments/ Administrators, leaders, etc.	3.14	0.110
UCC external publics receive information through the University's Radio Station-ATL FM.	3.14	0.823
Students and staff receive information through the University's Radio Station- ATL FM.	3.06	0.74
UCC external publics receive information through special occasions in the University.	2.68	0.910
Students and staff receive information through the grapevine rumors.	2.53	0.060
UCC external publics receive information through the internet.	2.52	0.972
UCC external publics receive information through memos, circulars and letters.	2.35	0.900
UCC external publics receive information through the Registrar.	2.31	0.875

From Table 3, the highest and the lowest mean values were 3.47 and 2.31 respectively. Again, only 5 representing 33.3% of the 15 "means of communication to the public" had average values greater than 3.00. This means that these five means were the most commonly used ones.

In short, the grand mean for the 15 means of communication that the University authorities used was 2.9. This statistically means that the respondents "agree" that they used them to get information to staff, students and their external publics. This supports a finding by Frost (2003) that managers spend their official day communicating with other people: subordinates, peers,

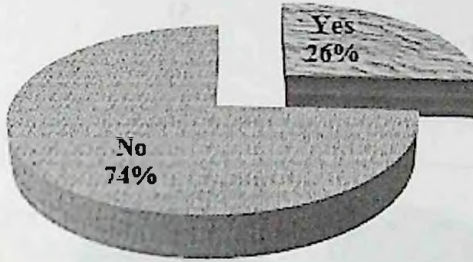
supervisors, customers, suppliers and many others by telephone, face-to-face meeting, electronic mail, written memos and reports among others. On the same issue, Clark (2000) stated that managers spend 70% more of their official time exchanging ideas and information with other people, singly or in groups using appropriate means.

Also, it confirms the scaffolding concept and alternative choice and different channels or medium of communication by user as espoused by Timmerman and Madhavapedu (2008).

### The Radio as a means of Communication

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether or not they used

radio to communicate to their publics and their responses are contained in Figure 1.



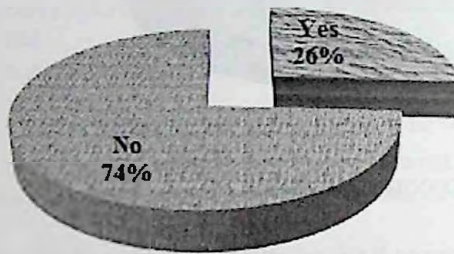
**Figure 1:** Use of radio to communicate

Clearly, the majority (71.0%) of them responded positively to the question. Of the respondents (n=55) 55 respondents who responded "Yes," as many as 96.4% mostly used the University Radio Station (ATL FM), while only 3.6% used other radio stations to communicate to the public. Table 4 summarizes the reasons why respondents used the University Radio (ATL FM) to communicate to the university's publics. Easy accessibility, least cost and convenience were identified as the main reasons why some senior members used the FM Station. Their responses

as presented below indicate that ATL FM has become relevant in the organization communication of the university. The fact that 98.2% use the station because it is less expensive comparatively to other radio stations means that the university can explore the use of the station further in corporate communication. Beside, all the respondents (100%) said that the station is easily accessible. The implication is that the station could be used easily in the university's corporate communication efforts and possibly teaching and research dissemination.

**Table 4: Reasons for the Use of ATL FM**

Reasons	Frequency (n= 55)	Percentage (%)
Easy accessibility	55	100.0
Less expensive	54	98.2
More convenient	53	96.4
Most listened to	51	92.7
It is an official University Radio Station	50	90.9
Wider coverage	49	89.1
Others	41	74.5

**Figure 2: Use of television in communicating**

From Figure 2, the majority (74%) of the respondents indicated that they did not use the TV while the remaining claimed that they used it in communicating to the public. Out of the 20 of them who used the TV, 90% used the Ghana Television (GTV) because it had a wider coverage and very clearer than others.

On whether or not respondents used newspapers to communicate, 72.7%

agreed while 27.3% disagreed. The "Daily Graphic" and "The Ghanaian Times" were mentioned as the most used newspapers with the reasons that they had wider circulation. Other means of communication used by the University's authorities to communicate included the billboards, public lectures, banners and foreign embassies as indicated in Table 5.



**Table 5: Other means of communication used by the University**

Means	Frequency (N = 77)	Percentage (%)
Billboards	75	97.4
Public lectures	74	96.1
Hosting of banners	71	92.2
Foreign embassies	70	90.9

It can be deduced from the responses in Figures 1 and 2, Tables 3, 4 and 5 that in the choice and use of media prior knowledge, building experiences related to use of a medium, prediction of media selection due to these experiences, effectiveness of the media and convenience are factors to be considered by users. This empirical evidence supports the channel expansion theory's claims that knowledge building experiences with medium, communication partner and topic positively related to perceptions of a medium's richness and that these relationships are fairly

consistent across the use of media (Daft & Langel, 1984; Fulk, 1993; Markus, 1994; Rice, 1992).

#### **UCC authorities' perception on the Role of Media in Corporate Communication**

The study through research question two sought to investigate the kind of perception that the University authorities had on the roles of the media in the university's corporate communication. Their responses are presented in Tables 6, 7 and 8 followed accordingly by the discussions.

**Table 6: Ranked means on the Perceptions of the Roles of the Media in Corporate Communication**

Roles of Media	M*	SD
To inform the society.	3.80	0.437
To transmit an important information to the University's publics and the general public.	3.56	0.550
To be used as a tool for advertising products and programmes of the University.	3.54	0.502
To bring the University and its publics together and help to advance the University's developmental agenda.	3.47	0.577
To be educating the University's publics on policies and programmes of the University.	3.43	0.596

To be used as an administrative tool.	2.84	0.749
To be used as crisis management tool.	2.81	0.699
To be the surveillance of the University's environment.	2.77	0.850
To be the correlation of part of the University community.	2.72	0.755
To manage attacks on University authorities.	2.72	0.918

With "To inform the society" is viewed as the most important role of the media with an average value of 3.80 and standard deviation of 0.437 as shown in Table 6. Using the percentages, the item-by-item analysis further reveals that as many as 81.1% and 17.6% gave strongly agreed and agreed responses respectively. Besides that with mean value of 3.56 with a standard deviation of 0.550, the majority (97.4%) of the respondents somewhat agreed that the role of the mass media in corporate communication was to transmit an important information to the University's publics and the general public.

Also, with an average value of 3.54 with a standard deviation of 0.502, as many as 53.9% and 45.1% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the role of the mass media was to be used as tool for advertising products and programmes of the University. With a mean value of 3.47 and a variation 0.577, 51.3% and 47.7% of the respondents claimed that the role of the media for corporate communication in the University was to bring the University and its publics together and help to advance the University's developmental agenda. Notwith-

standing, the lowest mean value of 2.72 with a standard deviation of 0.918 was recorded for the following statements: To manage attacks on University authorities, and to be the surveillance of the University's environment.

Similarly from Table 6, the highest and the least means were 3.80 and 2.72 respectively, while the standard deviations ranged between 0.437 and 0.939. The five main roles identified by the respondents as the roles of the media in corporate communication were as follows (according to the magnitude of mean values): to inform the society, to transmit an important information to the University's publics and the general public, to be used as a tool for advertising products and programmes of the University, to bring the University and its publics together and help to advance the University's developmental agenda and to be educating the University's publics on policies and programmes of the University, while the least roles were "to manage attacks on University authorities," and "to be the correlation of part of the University community."

Overall, the average mean value for these statements was 3.20, so it is in

agree level. It implies that all respondents agreed on the roles of the media in UCC's corporate communication in support of Jackson's (1987) finding that corporate communication serves as the liaison between an organization and its publics. Effective corporate communication therefore can enhance the University's image and improve the institution's overall competitiveness (Beavers-Moss, 2001).

Respondents believed that other roles of the media included: Educating students on job opportunities (94.8%) and educating the public about the roles of the University in nation building (90.1%). On what they considered as the importance of the media to the University authorities, they mentioned among other things: Disseminating and publicizing information about the University,

educating the public on programmes, projects, research and vision of the University and to help inform students about what is going on in the University. The above points to the fact that these authorities perceive that the role of media is very important in the life of the University. To them communication may be possible without media, but media help communication to get easy and better.

Indeed, with today's ongoing globalization and increasing competitions, the University of Cape Coast authorities must appreciate how to protect and uphold the university's corporate identity and reputation through media relations. Relationship between the university and the media was found to be cordial. This is illustrated in Table 7.

**Table 7: Relationship between UCC and the Media**

Nature of relationship	Frequency	Percentage
Very Cordial	10	13.0
Cordial	55	71.4
Not Cordial	12	15.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100.0</b>

An overwhelming majority (84.4%) of the respondents had indicated that the relationship between UCC and the media was somewhat cordial. Only 12 (15.6%) disagreed with them. It is good that the relationship between

UCC Authorities and the media is good. UCC authorities must be appreciating what the media can do with media's Agenda Setting Theory. A theory that argues that the media may not tell us what to think, but the

media certainly tell us what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

### Challenges posed by the Media

On challenges that the media posed to

the University authorities, respondents identified a number of challenges as illustrated in Table 8.

**Table 8: Challenges posed by the media**

Challenges	Frequency (N=77)	Percentage (%)
Misrepresentation of information	77	100.0
Reporting of non cross-checked information	77	100.0
Presenting views as official information from the University	77	100.0
Expensive services	75	97.4
Students tarnishing the reputation of the University through the media	70	90.9
Others	58	75.3

Misrepresentation of information (100.0%), reporting of non cross-checked information and presentation of views as though they were official ones from the University (100.0%) were the main challenges that respondents mentioned as tarnishing the reputation of the University. Others included expensive nature of the services of the media among others. The statement that all respondents were of the view that the media misrepresented and misreported views as though such views were official views from the university is a worrying situation. A close examination of this situation reveals two things: the media is being unprofessional/ unethical or the University authorities are not giving the media the needed information to

be disseminated to the public, hence the media is compelled to engage in non-cross check of facts and information, leading to speculative journalism. Whichever way one looks at the situation, this is a challenge.

Respondents suggested various solutions to the challenges as stated in Table 9. These suggested solutions are to improve the relationship between the media and the University authorities.

### Proposed solutions to Challenges

Respondents further proposed some strategies through which the challenges associated with the university's relationship with the media could be enhanced. This is presented in Table 9

**Table 9: Solutions to the Challenges and Way Forward**

Solutions	Frequency (N = 77)	Percentage (%)
Media Practitioners cross-checking of information	77	100.0
Use the Public Affairs Division to seek out information	77	100.0
Experts from the university should be invited on issues	75	97.4
Students and staff be encouraged to listen to ATL FM	75	97.4
Media dialogue and institutional meetings with authorities of the University	68	88.3
Others	51	66.2

**Way Forward**

Way Forward (Suggestions)	Frequency (N = 77)	percentage (%)
Free-flow of information from Management to the media	77	100.0
Effective use of local language to cater for public interest	67	87.0
Effective collaboration	76	98.7
Regular Website update	77	100.0
Use of media practitioners in the University in corporate planning and branding	70	90.9
Frequent press interactions	77	100.0
Others	52	75.3

It can be seen from Table 9 that the main suggestions put across by the respondents include cross-checking of information so that only accurate reportage is made (100.0%), and the use of the Division of Public Affairs in seeking information about the University (100.0%). They also recommended that only experts in issues about the University are invited for discussion in the media

and also, students and staff should be encouraged to patronize the University official radio-ATL FM.

Respondents also expressed their views on how the activities of the Division of Public Affairs may be improved. Approximately 88% of the 77 respondents commended the Division's efforts and indicated also that there was more room for

improvement while the remaining did not appreciate their activities citing reasons that they had not helped in projecting the image of the University.

Finally, as responses to research question five, respondents suggested ways by which the use of the media can be made effective for corporate communication and reputation management as indicated in table 9.

Many suggestions came up as to how the media could be effectively used for corporate communication and reputation management by the University. Among them are: the free-flow of information from management (100.0%), updating of the University's official website at least twice a day, and frequent press interactions with the media (100.0%). Effective collaborations and the use of professional media practitioners in the University in corporate planning and branding (90.9%) were also overwhelmingly suggested by the respondents.

As communication is the lifeline of any organization, be it formal or informal, it is not surprising that respondents made those suggestions above. The individual authority and the institution at large must develop effective communication skills, structures and strategies for effective corporate communication (Tayeb, 2000).

## Conclusions

As can be seen from the discussion so far, managing corporate communication in a huge complex organization like the University of Cape Coast requires competent leadership and responsive communication set-up that is driven by effective communication process responsive to media dynamics and challenges.

The idea of the role of the media in corporate communication has been accepted in the University of Cape Coast with senior members (respondents) appreciating the role of media in corporate communication and reputation management. In this fast changing technological world, all organizations including the University of Cape Coast, must pay special attention to Internet-based technologies alongside the use of notice boards, face-to-face, memo, circulars, letters and traditional means of communication. The study found that the virtual invisibility of the University and its activities on the world-wide-web (internet) was partly responsible for the university not occupying good position in the ranking of universities in Africa and the world at large.

Furthermore, although the study found out that the University has adopted the use of multiple media especially radio, television and print media to communicate to students, staff and its large external public

which agrees with the proposal by Bazerman (1999) and Clark (1997), the University's use of media, especially radio, television and newspapers is mostly uncoordinated.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are made to help strengthen the operations of the media towards the enhancement of the university's corporate activities:

1. The use of web-based technologies should be encouraged in the University. The researcher recommends that the University authorities must make internet facilities accessible to all students and staff to facilitate communication while the official website of the University is frequently updated. Again, the university should provide ultramodern state of the art information, communication and telecommunication centre to aid in corporate communication, research and information dissemination.
2. The University's Public Affairs Division must be more opened to the general public especially the media so that the media would always have accurate and cross-checked information to report on the University. The Division should be mindful of the three categories of Public relation: the controlled PR, the Uncontrolled PR and the semi-controlled PR in order to use them appropriately and effectively, especially in these times of global mass media evolution, the pluralistic media environment, the new sophisticated information, communication and technological era and also the role of media as a platform for advocacy and also at the same time as a watchdog for development.
3. All effort should be made by the University authorities to encourage both the students and staff to patronize and listen to the University's Radio Station – ATL FM. The University should educate students and staff on the role and importance of the ATL FM particularly and the media in general in corporate UCC.
4. The University should empower, resource and charge its Division of Public Affairs to ensure that the use of media, especially radio, television and newspapers is properly co-ordinated and authorized in University of Cape Coast

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